



United States Department of Agriculture

# Record of Decision for the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

Cochise, Graham, Pima, Pinal, and Santa Cruz Counties, Arizona,  
and Hidalgo County, New Mexico



Forest Service

Southwestern Region

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# **Record of Decision for the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan**

**Cochise, Graham, Pima, Pinal, and Santa Cruz Counties, Arizona;  
Hidalgo County, New Mexico**

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## Introduction

This public Record of Decision documents my decision and rationale for approving the new Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (also referred to as “forest plan” or “plan”). This revised plan provides Coronado National Forest-specific guidance and information for project and activity decisionmaking, and will guide all resource management activities on the Coronado for the next 10 to 15 years. It replaces the previous plan, which was approved in 1986 and has been amended 12 times. The decision facilitates the goal of the Department of Agriculture, to promote sound land stewardship in partnership with communities.

## Forest Setting

The Coronado National Forest covers approximately 1.78 million acres in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico. The Forest is divided into five ranger districts: Santa Catalina, Safford, Douglas, Sierra Vista and Nogales. These districts are composed of “Sky Islands” encircled by desert and grasslands which isolate 16 widely scattered mountain ranges that offer an unusual range of vegetative types and climates. The tree-covered majestic mountains rising from grassy savannas and the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Desert lowlands are home to plant and animal communities described as among the most diverse found on Earth.

The Santa Catalina District includes Forest Service managed lands in the Santa Catalina and Rincon mountain ranges. Pima County (population of 1,205,341) encompasses the largest community (Tucson) adjacent to this district. The Safford Ranger District incorporates four different mountain ranges, including Mount Graham, which is nearby to the community of Safford (9,440). The Douglas Ranger District includes the Dragoon, Chiricahua, and Peloncillo mountain ranges. Douglas (16,740) and Bisbee (6,390) are communities within this district. The Sierra Vista Ranger District includes the Whetstone, Huachuca and Patagonia mountain ranges. Sierra Vista (42,805) is the largest community adjacent to this district. The Nogales District contains the San Luis, Tumacacori, Pajarito, and Santa Rita mountain ranges. The community of Nogales (21,375) is the largest in this district. The southernmost portion of the Coronado National Forest shares 58 miles of contiguous international border with the United Mexican States.

The social and economic environment surrounding the Coronado National Forest is as diverse as the natural environment. It includes large urban areas, international border cities, and many rural communities. The six county area that surrounds the Coronado National Forest is experiencing rapid growth, with a nearly 60 percent population increase between the 1990 and 2010 census years. The Coronado National Forest plays a key role in contributing to the jobs and income needs of this expanding population. Goods and services provided by the Coronado National Forest include forage for livestock production, fuelwood, and forest products such as beargrass for baskets, fiddleneck ferns for flower arrangements, and manzanita branches for birdcage perches. The lands within what is now the Coronado National Forest continue to provide sustenance and spiritual values to Native American tribes. Outfitting and guiding services provide an important link between visitors and the ecological treasures of the Coronado. Many areas of the Coronado are highly mineralized, and the Forest Service has an important role in administering mineral exploration and extraction, like the Rosemont Copper Mine, while minimizing surface resource impacts, consistent with mining regulations and policy. Of primary and increasing importance are the watersheds and the ability to capture the precipitation that recharges aquifers, supplying domestic water sources to the cities (including the city of Tucson) surrounding and towns surrounding the Coronado National Forest.

A wide variety of year-round recreational opportunities is available within the Coronado National Forest. Higher elevations are more popular during the summer, offering temperatures 20 or more degrees cooler than the desert. Lower elevation recreation areas are located in scenic canyons and foothills; these are most popular during the fall, winter, and spring. Special places that are popular include Sabino Canyon Recreation Area, Mount Lemmon, and Madera Canyon. Recreation opportunities on the Coronado include over 1,100 miles of trails (including the Arizona Trail, a national scenic trail), three scenic byways, five lakes, rental cabins, eight wilderness areas, and dozens of developed campgrounds and picnic areas. Recreational opportunities also include skiing, historic interpretation, and private cabins. Of the jobs and income generated annually by the Coronado National Forest, more than half the jobs created (nearly 700) and nearly half the income generated (over \$20 million) are attributable to recreation related activities.

Each ranger district administers one or more ecosystem management areas with a total of 12 ecosystem management areas that make up the Coronado National Forest. These ecosystem management areas range in size from approximately 28,068 acres in the Winchester Ecosystem Management Area to 291,558 acres in the Chiricahua Ecosystem Management Area. Each ecosystem management area supports a unique combination of vegetation, habitats, and wildlife, thus harboring an amazing amount of biological diversity. Distinct species have evolved within the Coronado's sky islands due to barriers to movement. Mountain ranges harbor numerous endemic and rare species such as Mount Graham red squirrel, Sonora tiger salamander, Huachuca water umbel, and the Mexican long-nosed bat.

The vertical stacking of life zones (environments characterized by particular groupings of plants and animals) in these steep mountains packs tremendous species diversity into the space of each slope. In a day's walk, one can climb through desert and scrub habitats characteristic of central Mexico, up to spruce-fir forests characteristic of Canada. Madrean encinal savanna and woodland are widespread at middle elevations in this region, forming one of the distinguishing features of the sky islands of the Coronado National Forest.

The Coronado National Forest retains remnants from its complex historic and cultural legacy. From pictographs, petroglyphs, and pottery shards left by ancient peoples; to remains of old mines and ranches, the lands of the Coronado harbor a wealth of cultural values. Place names across the Coronado are reminders of cultures and people who have lived in the sky island region and shaped the character of the land. Native American tribal interest in the region remains strong.

## Needs for Change

The need for change and subsequent revised Forest plan is an outcome of extensive collaboration with State and local governments and other Federal agencies, tribal consultation, and engagement with the public and other groups. Forest plan revision on the Coronado National Forest was initiated based on legal requirements and significant changes that have occurred in conditions, demands, and scientific understanding since the 1986 plan went into effect.

The 1986 plan was approved over 30 years ago, well beyond the 10 to 15 year duration provided by the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1606(e)(5)(A)), and does not fully address changes that have occurred to economic, social, and ecological conditions; new policies and priorities; and new information based on monitoring and scientific research. Five overarching "needs for change" were identified during iterative pre-revision collaborative dialogues, meetings, focus groups, studies, and assessments. These efforts involved State and local governments, other Federal agencies, tribes, and many public groups, organizations, and individuals.

A Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER; 2009) and its supplement (2010) composed the Analysis of Management Situation, which documented the needs for change, were developed from two preliminary plan revision documents: the “Coronado National Forest Social and Economic Sustainability Report” (2008) and the “Coronado National Forest Ecological Sustainability Report” (2009). The five priority needs for change in plan direction as identified in the Comprehensive Evaluation Report are:

1. **Preservation of open space:** new direction is needed to support the retention of the rural character (ranching lifestyles, fuelwood gathering, etc.) of southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico, while at the same time accommodating the aesthetic and recreational benefits of open landscapes desired by rapidly growing populations and municipalities. Important to achieving this objective is direction that encourages the sustainability of undeveloped landscapes within the national forest boundary and emphasizes coordination with State and local governments and private land owners to protect open space within and adjacent to the Coronado National Forest.
2. **Access to National Forest System lands:** updated direction is needed to guide cooperation and collaboration with State and local governments, other Federal agencies, and other local landowners to acquire or restore public and administrative vehicular access to areas of the Coronado where it is currently unavailable or compromised and to maintain access for future users.
3. **Communities, collaboration, and partnerships:** new direction is needed with regard to the use of collaboration and partnerships as tools for attaining both community and forest goals, existing and future social and working relationships among the Coronado and leaders in the communities it serves, including Native American nations. Positive relationships will require a mutual understanding of direction in the revised forest plan and its compatibility with the regulations, plans, and interests of other entities.
4. **Visitor experiences:** updated direction is needed to balance competing visitor uses (e.g., supporting both quiet recreation areas and areas that accommodate more developed, rustic settings that provide opportunities for social interaction and greater human comforts), and new direction is needed to address public safety issues related to illegal activities across the Coronado.
5. **Ecosystem restoration and resiliency:** various aspects of a resilient ecosystem require both new and updated individual and integrated direction regarding habitat conservation and restoration, species conservation, management of vegetative fuels, management of wildfire and ecological responses to it, management of invasive species, and dealing with the effects of climate change.

The need for change topics presented above represent a systematic framework for discussing the revised plan. In addition, the revised plan carries forward other management direction not identified as needing change or that needed only minor changes to achieve the multiple-use balance sought in this decision, the need for change topics were used to develop alternatives.

## Collaboration with State and Local Governments and other Federal Agencies

Forest staff have met with local, State, and other Federal governments to discuss the revised Forest Plan, as the revision process progressed through to the Record of Decision. Forest Service planning regulations require the agency to consider other Federal, State, and local government

plans and policies. As part of the collaboration effort in developing the revised Plan, the Coronado National Forest engaged in a number of discussions with these entities throughout the duration of the plan revision effort. Concerns identified by local government focused on access. To address this issue, the new plan presents components to improve access by working collaboratively to identify and prioritize 40 to 50 existing roads and trails where permanent legal access can be achieved over the next ten years. The new plan was developed with input from these collaborative efforts and was coordinated with Federal, State, and local agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and local government and community leaders.

Since the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, the Forest Supervisor and other management team members have engaged Congressional leadership, state and local representatives and agencies. In general, these governmental representatives support the work of the Forest and appreciate the transparent communication and the dedication of the Coronado National Forest towards public land stewardship. Although some concerns have been expressed by a few counties regarding recommended wilderness areas, in particular to the premise that there should be no limitations or restrictions placed on the public's ability to utilize the lands that fall within their counties, the counties remain in overall support of the revised plan.

## Tribal Consultation

The Coronado National Forest staff consulted with 12 Native American tribes that use the Coronado for traditional, cultural, or spiritual activities. These tribes include the Ak-Chin Indian Community, Fort Sill Chiricahua-Warm Springs Apache Tribe, Gila River Indian Community, Hopi Tribe, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation, White Mountain Apache Tribe, Yavapai-Apache Nation, and Pueblo of Zuni. The forest plan was presented to the Four Southern Tribes Cultural Working Group in 2013. Tribes in attendance included San Carlos, Gila River, Tohono O'odham and the Pascua Yaqui. In meetings and field trips, tribal representatives contributed to the development of desired conditions, objectives and management approaches for the revised forest plan and reviewed working draft revised plan components. Concerns identified by the tribes include better accommodating traditional ties and cultural uses in decision-making and planning; integrating the role of cultural and other noneconomic values in decision-making (particularly, the traditional cultural property of Mount Graham); incorporating knowledge in forest management and planning; protecting the privacy of cultural sites; and cooperating in the management of resources of mutual interests to tribes and the Forest Service. Consultation with affiliated tribes ensured the plan components addressed the above tribal concerns and needs with respect to the national forest.

## Public Involvement

A variety of opportunities for meaningful dialogue and public involvement were provided throughout the plan revision process, including the initial ecological and socioeconomic sustainability assessments, development, and finalization of the plan, and the consideration of effects in the Final Environmental Impact Statement. As explained in chapter 1 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the plan is based in part on public involvement and collaboration over the course of many years.

Informal discussions with the public regarding needed changes to the 1986 plan began during the spring of 2005. From spring 2005 through 2014, the Coronado National Forest hosted 38 public meetings, open houses, and workshops in nearby communities.



In the spring of 2005, focus groups were conducted to identify and/or quantify attitudes toward and values and beliefs related to national forest lands. In June 2006, a series of six public workshops was held across the Coronado establishing social and working relationships with the public and to elucidate the “needs for change” based on the content of the 1986 forest plan. Four hundred individuals participated in the workshops in 39 small work groups. Forty topics related to the “Need for Change” were identified as a result of these workshops. To prioritize the 40 need for change topics, six workshops were held in September 2006 utilizing a format similar to that of the June 2006 meetings. Attendance was approximately 250, and there were 30 small work groups.

Seven workshops were held in 2007 to begin the development of desired condition statements, based on the prioritized needs for change. Using the same format as previous workshops, the Coronado hosted 152 attendees and 20 small work groups.

In 2008, seven open houses were held to present the first draft revised forest plan products to the public, including some based on public input to date, as well as others derived from revision team input. There was a total of 240 attendees, some of whom indicated an affiliation with a group, and 56 different groups or organizations were represented.

A notice of intent to revise the 1986 plan and prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was published in the Federal Register on January 27, 2010. The notice requested additional input on the five “need for change” topics, provided a description of changes in direction necessary to address revision topics and provided a general description of the revised plan content that would address the need for change topics.

Six open houses were held in 2010 to share the draft plan related documents and a preliminary working draft revised forest plan with the public. The working draft described desired conditions, objectives, guidelines, standards, and suitability of uses. Comments from the public meetings were used to modify the working draft. Evaluations of potential wilderness areas were also shared to elucidate public input on the need for new wilderness areas. Approximately 200 individuals attended, representing 54 groups and organizations.

After the intense fire season of 2011, forest plan revision efforts were suspended while conditions were reassessed and the results incorporated into the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Collaboration with the public continued during this interim period in the form of planning team participation in academic forums and meetings with other groups. A major collaborative effort underway was the Integrated Lands Assessment Project Sky Islands, which tested revised forest plan objectives for vegetation treatments.

Prior to the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement in November 2013, the Coronado National Forest had received over 3,600 comments since initiation in 2005. These comments received early in the public involvement process were used along with science-based evaluations (e.g., “Analysis of the Management Situation”) to draft the initial proposed plan. Comments received later in the process were used to modify the proposed plan, where appropriate. In general, many comments fell into the following categories: forest health and restoration, treatment methods, wildlife needs, recreation opportunities, wilderness resources, wild and scenic rivers, threats to communities from wildfire, contributions to local communities including availability of forest products and rangelands, land exchanges, and new energy corridors.

Following the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on November 22, 2013, a notice of availability was published in the Federal Register that initiated the formal 90-day comment period on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Forest Plan as required by Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 219. The formal 90-day comment period was later extended to 104 days. It provided additional opportunities for public involvement in the review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and plan revision processes. During the comment period, the planning team hosted five public meetings in the communities of Douglas, Rio Rico, Sierra Vista, Safford and Tucson Arizona to answer questions and solicit comments. In addition, the Forest Supervisor and planning team attended meetings with local town councils, the Ranching Heritage Alliance (permittees), The Malpai Borderlands Group, Friends of Redington Pass, Natural Resource Working Group (stakeholders with restoration focus), and the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

In May of 2014, the Coronado National Forest also hosted a wilderness workshop seeking input on individuals' and organizations' priorities on specific areas under consideration for recommendation for wilderness designation.

As a result of the public comment period, almost 2,300 comment letters were received from individuals, organizations, agencies, and three tribes. These comments are summarized and responded to in appendix A and appendix L of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The comments led to minor changes throughout the plan and environmental impact statement, all of which were within the scope of the analysis in the draft environmental impact statement.

In general, the public likes the way things are on the Coronado National Forest. They want the Coronado staff to preserve the quiet places but continue to allow motorized recreation. It was very clear throughout the plan revision process that surrounding communities want to be recognized in the forest plan, and want to continue to be engaged in the management of National Forest lands. The new forest plan represents community interests for sustainable levels of tourism, recreation, mining, livestock grazing, and fuelwood cutting. And, it sets a framework for building on desires for continued participation by outlining management approaches that encourage shared stewardship and identify key groups that have a substantial interest and commitment to management of the Coronado National Forest.

## Land and Resource Management Planning

### Nature of Forest Plan Decisions

The nature of forest plan decisions is outlined in the 1976 National Forest Management Act. The Act requires all national forests and grasslands in the National Forest System to develop plans that direct resource management activities. These plans are to be revised when conditions have changed significantly, or on a 10 to 15-year cycle.

The revised plan establishes a framework for future decisionmaking by outlining a broad, interdisciplinary program for achieving the desired goals, objectives, and future conditions of the Coronado National Forest. It represents decisions that are strategic in nature, does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project, and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to conduct the Forest Service's internal operations (such as personnel matters, law enforcement, fleet management, or organizational changes). By applying programmatic management direction, the plan is carried out through the design, implementation, and monitoring of site-specific activities such as relocating a trail, conducting a prescribed burn, or harvesting timber. Subsequent decisions for these activities will be designed to be consistent

with the strategic decisions made in the revised plan and are subject to separate analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The revised plan is accompanied by a Final Environmental Impact Statement, which provides analysis that discloses the environmental consequences of the alternative management strategies considered and discusses how these alternatives respond to issues and concerns raised during internal and collaborative processes.

## **The Revised Forest Plan**

Forest plan revision on the Coronado National Forest was initiated based on legal requirements and significant changes that have occurred in conditions, demands, and scientific understanding since the 1986 plan went into effect. Need for revision is based on the following:

- The plan is beyond the 10 to 15 year duration provided by the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1606(e)(5)(A)).
- Assessment of the sustainability of social, economic, and ecological Forest resources in light of continued management under the 1986 plan indicated several needs for change, which are documented in the Analysis of the Management Situation, as required by the 1982 Planning Rule. The “Needs for Change” section earlier in this document provides further detail.
- New science and information has become available since the current plan was developed more than 25 years ago.

With this decision, the selected alternative will become the new Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This revised plan replaces the 1986 plan. This new plan is part of the long-range resource planning framework established by the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, and the 2012 Revision of the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan. The Final Environmental Impact Statement and revised Coronado Forest Plan were developed according to the National Forest Management Act, its implementing regulations at 36 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 219; the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the Council on Environmental Quality regulations at 40 CFR 1500-1508, and Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR 220.

According to transition language of the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3), the responsible official may elect to complete and approve the plan revision in conformance with the provisions of a prior planning regulation (36 CFR part 299, published at 36 CFR parts 200 to 299, revised as of July 1, 2010). For this revision of the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, I have elected to follow these provisions, referred to collectively in this document as the “1982 Rule.”

This decision applies only to National Forest System lands of the Coronado National Forest located in the aforementioned counties. It does not apply to any other Federal, State, or private lands, although the effects of activities occurring on these lands and the effects of my decision on lands that surround the national forest are also considered.

## **Alternatives Considered**

This section describes the alternatives considered in this Record of Decision in order to provide important context for the decision being made. The Coronado National Forest analyzed four

alternatives in detail: no action, the modified proposed action<sup>1</sup>, and two alternatives developed in response to issues raised by the public.

All alternatives in the Final Environmental Impact Statement adhere to multiple use and sustained yield of goods and services (36 CFR 219.1(a), (b)). In addition, they share objectives and standards for managing forest resources and complying with applicable laws and policies. They also contain the same direction to contribute to the diversity of desired native and non-native plant and animal communities and contribute toward the recovery of threatened and endangered species.

The need for change topics drove alternative development. The primary difference between alternatives is the emphasis on wilderness or motorized recreation to meet the purpose and need for change, and address one or more of the revision topics.

Each alternative was developed to be in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, as well as national policy and direction. The following objectives did not change between all four alternatives in the Final Environmental Impact Statement:

- comply with laws, regulations, and policies;
- sustain environmentally acceptable multiple uses of products from, and services on the Coronado, which include special uses for various purposes, including the right to access and develop leasable and locatable minerals; harvest fuelwood and other forest products, graze livestock and produce forage; and engage in various recreational activities, such as hunting, hiking, camping, and fishing;
- provide for and maintain a diversity of plant and animal communities to meet multiple-use objectives;
- conserve soil and water resources;
- cause no significant or permanent loss of productivity of the land;
- maintain air quality that meets or exceeds applicable Federal, State, and/or local standards or regulations;
- provide suitable, well-distributed habitat across the Coronado to ensure species viability;
- include measures for preventing the destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat for threatened and endangered species;
- protect heritage resources;
- recognize and respect the unique status of Native American tribes and their rights conveyed by trust and treaty with the United States;
- require consultation with tribes about traditional resources, ties, and interests about site-specific proposed actions;
- recommend the current Mount Graham Wilderness Study Area for congressional wilderness designation<sup>2</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> This alternative is a modified version of the proposed action alternative presented in the draft Environmental Impact Statement. This version adds two additional recommended wilderness areas to the original proposed action alternative.

<sup>2</sup> The Mount Graham Wilderness Study Area was formally established by Congress in 1984. The same area was recommended for wilderness designation in the 1986 plan, but that recommendation was never acted on by Congress.

- continue to protect specially designated areas (e.g., wilderness, eligible wild and scenic rivers, research natural areas); and
- recommend a boundary change for the Santa Catalina Research Natural Area.

The modified proposed action, alternative 1, and alternative 2 each include management direction that preserves the undeveloped character of inventoried roadless areas on the Coronado. The no action alternative does not include specific management direction for inventoried roadless areas because the 1986 forest plan became effective prior to the designation of inventoried roadless areas, and therefore, did not address them at all. Under this alternative, the inventoried roadless areas would still be subject to the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule at 36 C.F.R. Part 294 (2001).

### **The No Action Alternative (1986 Plan)**

The No Action Alternative (No Action) represents the 1986 forest plan, as amended, and continues current management direction. The plan describes objectives, standards, and guidelines, the latter of which are collectively referred to as “plan components” for each element.

- Provides direction for ecosystem maintenance and improvement for the resource elements of range, wildlife and fish, timber, soil, and water although it does not ensure future ecosystem restoration and sustainability.
- Allocates 5,000 acres for timber production with all lands within Management Areas 4 and 7 and portions of five additional management areas available for livestock use.
- Encourages development of open space through emphasis on consolidation of small private landholdings into economically viable units.
- Designates 15 geographically specific parcels of forest land (management areas or MAs), each of which is to be managed according to its intended use(s).
- Provides direction on developed recreation and non-motorized, non-mechanized activities within four different management areas. There is minimal direction regarding dispersed recreation.
- Recommends Mount Graham Wilderness Study Area be designated as a wilderness.
- Provides direction for seven specially designated areas including: three research natural areas, one research ranch (Appleton-Whittel), and three other areas totaling 6,856 acres.

### **Modified Proposed Action**

The Modified Proposed Action Alternative was designed to address the needs for change by addressing ecosystem restoration and resiliency, visitor experiences, access to National Forest System lands, preservation of open space, and communities, collaboration, and partnerships.

- Provides for sustainable levels of tourism, recreation, mining, livestock grazing, and fuelwood cutting. Management approaches include making timber and other forest products available for the public either through personal-use permits or commercial sales, and promoting available forest product use as a result of forest management activities.

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All alternatives for plan revision carry forward the recommendation to designate this wilderness study area as a formal wilderness area. The area will continue to be managed as a wilderness study area until Congress takes action on this recommendation.

- Encourages and emphasizes collaboration with local, county, and state governments, tribes, other federal agencies and the public as an effective management strategy throughout the life of the plan for most resource and social elements.
- Identifies areas where improved access is necessary but currently nonexistent or limited. Public access was one of the primary concerns expressed by the public as something they wanted to see protected. The challenge is that of the 300 or so access points to the Coronado National Forest, only 1/3 of them have permanent legal status. To address this issue, the new plan presents a full suite of plan components to guide the resolution of the legal status deficiencies on 40 to 50 existing roads and trails in the next ten years.
- Emphasizes the preservation of open space through components that address range management, wildlife, and scenery. The direction in preservation of open space was emphasized through the major conservation efforts of neighboring land owners and jurisdictions. In particular, the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, a landmark conservation plan designed to preserve endangered species in Pima County. Also, the Malpai Borderlands Group which has effectively provided incentives to preclude development and fragmentation on over 1 million acres adjacent to the Coronado National Forest. These efforts benefit the Forest Service goals for social and ecological sustainability, and the new forest plan presents plan components that lend support to neighbors who choose to preserve open space and rural cultural heritage.
- Supports responsible, environmentally sound energy and mineral development and reclamation on the Coronado National Forest to fulfill the needs of local communities for social and economic growth. It contains standards and guidelines aimed at minimizing adverse impacts from mineral extraction and mining activities, such as the Rosemont Copper Mine, on sensitive forest resources.
- Recommends four land use zones: Roaded Backcountry, Wild backcountry, Developed Recreation, and Motorized Recreation accounting for 35 percent, 37 percent, 2 percent, and less than 1 percent respectively.
- Emphasizes quiet recreation on approximately 60 percent of the national forest while still providing for motorized opportunities.
- Provides direction for eight designated wilderness areas totaling 338,294 acres (19 percent of the national forest).
- Provides direction for two wilderness study areas totaling 31,215 acres; Bunk Robinson (19,052 acres) and Whitmire Canyon (12,163 acres).
- Recommends an additional 108,890 acres for wilderness. This includes the Ku Chish (26,266), Whetstone (16,317), Chiricahua Addition North (5,012) and Mount Graham (61,315) Wilderness Study Area<sup>3</sup>.
- Carries forward 14 special management areas and recommends an additional 5 areas including research natural areas, zoological, botanical, and biological research areas, for a total of 68,109 acres.
- Identifies 16 river segments that meet eligibility criteria for future designation as wild, scenic, or recreational rivers.

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<sup>3</sup> Mount Graham Wilderness is also proposed under the No Action Alternative.

- Facilitates the restoration and/or remediation of degraded resources and sustains healthy ecosystems into the future based on decades of ecological research (synthesized in GTR-310, Reynolds et al. 2013) which will move frequent-fire adapted systems toward increased resiliency by restoring spatial arrangement, structure, and species composition of vegetation. Treatments are focused in those potential natural vegetation types that are most divergent from desired conditions and priority watersheds. Establishes desired conditions for 9 major vegetation communities to be sustainable over time and resilient to disturbances.
- Provides protection for species from the potential effects of future site-specific management actions and identifies when management actions are needed to sustain and/or improve resource conditions.
- Establishes standards and guidelines for air, water, and soil resources and objectives for achieving desired conditions or intervening to sustain and/or improve the physical resource conditions.
- Protects biophysical habitats and states and objectives for attaining them when management actions are needed to sustain or improve them. Standards and guidelines are defined to protect them from the potential effects of future site-specific management actions.
- Identifies desired conditions for resources vulnerable to the effects of climate change and recommends specific management approaches focused on adaptation to improve ecosystem resiliency. Provides guidance for informing visitors about the risks associated with illegal border activity and appropriate safety precautions.

### **Alternative 1: Emphasis on Wilderness**

Alternative 1 responds to public comments that additional wilderness areas should be designated and recommends 255,448 acres be recommended for wilderness designation. The remaining components are the same as the modified proposed action with effects to access, preservation of open space, and communities, collaboration, and partnerships unchanged.

- Visitor experiences for quiet recreation and non-motorized uses would be enhanced with the additional acreage.
- Management for ecosystem restoration and resiliency would be dominated by natural processes on these recommended wilderness acres with mechanized and motorized uses permitted on a limited case-by-case basis to serve management purposes only and would not be permitted to alter the landscape permanently.

### **Alternative 2: Emphasis on Motorized Recreation**

Alternative 2 responds to public comments that forest management should emphasize more motorized recreation beyond what is specified under the modified proposed action and alternative 1. Under this alternative, the Motorized Recreation Land Use Zone would be 49,980 acres (45,117 more than the modified proposed action and alternative 1).

- Emphasizes motorized recreation through the provision of increased motorized recreation opportunities which include facilities such as off-loading ramps, courses for different skill levels and motorized trails. Concentration would occur in areas where motorized use is already prevalent and where sensitive resources are minimal.

- No new wilderness areas would be identified however the eight previously designated wilderness areas, three previously designated wilderness study areas, and Mount Graham Recommended Wilderness Area would be carried forward.
- Responds to ecosystem restoration and resiliency by localizing the impacts from motorized recreation through increasing the area where motorized recreation could occur which disperses the use and allows resource damaged areas to recover.
- Infrastructure is encouraged to help direct motorized and quiet recreation.
- Visitor experiences would be enhanced for motorized users although fewer areas would exist for quiet recreation and non-motorized recreation due to the increase in the Motorized Recreation Land Use Zone.
- Alternative 2 does not contain plan components (i.e., desired conditions and management approaches) for managing resources in response to climate change.

## **Resource Planning Act Alternative**

The provisions of the 1982 Planning Rule regulations at 219.12(f)(6) require forest plans to respond to and incorporate the Renewable Resource Planning Act Program objectives for each national forest as displayed in regional guides. There is no longer a regional guide for the Southwestern Region. This was withdrawn as required by the 2000 Planning Rule at 219.35(e)(2000 rule). The last Renewable Resource Planning Act Program was developed in 1995. In lieu of the Renewable Resource Planning Act Program, the Forest Service Strategic Plan 2015-2020 provides broad overarching national guidance for forest planning and national objectives for the agency as required by the Government Performance Results Act. All alternatives in this Final Environmental Impact Statement address these broad strategic objectives.

## **Alternatives Considered but Eliminated From Detailed Study**

In addition to the four alternatives described above, several alternatives were considered but not given detailed study. These alternatives considered public comments received in response to the proposed action and provided suggestions for alternative methods for achieving the purpose and need. Some of these alternatives may have been outside the scope of the plan revision process or already addressed by the alternatives considered in detail. The following alternatives were considered, but dismissed from detailed consideration for reasons summarized below. Further detail on these alternatives can be found in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, chapter 2.

### **No Grazing**

A “no grazing” alternative was recommended as an alternative based on concerns about conservation, the recovery of native biological diversity, and the need for restoration of natural processes that shape forest ecosystems and allow them to adjust to climate change. This alternative would eliminate all livestock grazing on the Coronado. Currently, grazing is permitted on approximately 82 percent of the national forest and managed in accordance with individual allotment management plans. This alternative was dropped from further consideration because the Coronado NF contains lands capable and suitable for livestock grazing, livestock grazing is an appropriate land use under the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act and the National Forest Management Act, and eliminating grazing would not meet the Coronado’s need for change.



## **Reduced Grazing**

There was a request that two alternatives be developed in which a 25 and 50 percent reduction in actual stock numbers would be analyzed. The forest plan does not specify stock numbers or stocking rates, and so these alternatives were not analyzed in detail. Further, in response to the issue that “Livestock grazing by cattle causes watershed, stream, and grassland degradation,” the forest considered a reduced grazing alternative, but concluded that it was not necessary because under all of the alternatives, the livestock grazing program has multiple mechanisms to evaluate, review, and adapt management as needed to effectively protect resources and respond to changing conditions. The effects from grazing in each range allotment are evaluated and adjusted (1) throughout the season, particularly when pasture rotation is being determined; (2) in detail at the beginning of the season when the annual operating instructions are determined; and (3) comprehensively on 10-15 year intervals, or more frequently when needed, as grazing is periodically reauthorized through the environmental analysis process. This allows for any needed adjustments to be made on a site specific basis to maintain and move toward desired conditions for watersheds, wildlife habitat, and other resources. For these reasons, and since the alternative would arbitrarily reduce levels of grazing across the forest, this alternative was not studied in detail.

## **Potential Wilderness Areas Requested for Consideration**

The Forest Service received various maps from members of the public with requests that specific areas be considered for recommendation as wilderness. Although portions of some mapped areas met Forest Service criteria for potential wilderness, none of them in their entirety would meet the Coronado’s need for change. Where feasible, portions of mapped areas were incorporated into wilderness recommendations under the modified proposed action and alternative 1.

## **Thirty-one Areas Recommended for Wilderness**

In the “Potential Wilderness Area Evaluation Report” 31 parcels were evaluated against Forest Service criteria for recommendation as wilderness. Sixteen of these were recommended as wilderness under alternative 1. Although all areas met the evaluation criteria, 15 of them did not fully meet the Coronado’s needs for change; therefore, they were excluded from detailed consideration in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

## **Maximize Certain Resources**

Some comments were made that alternatives should be developed that maximize ecological systems for protection of wildlife, vegetation, riparian areas, watershed, soils, range and incorporate the effects of climate change on ecosystems. An alternative exclusively addressing ecological systems was eliminated from detailed consideration because it would not meet the legal requirements of the National Forest Management Act or Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act, which require forests to be managed using multiple use, sustained yield principles. Further, given that the purpose of this analysis is to revise a current forest plan that is designed to continue to meet the multiple use mandates, maximization of ecological systems at the expense of other resources does not meet the purpose and need.

## **Minimum/No Management Alternative**

Some comments were also made to consider an alternative that involves no or minimal management on the Coronado National Forest, to let natural processes dominate without human intervention. This alternative was not considered in detail because it could not meet the purpose and need identified in chapter 1 and it could not meet legal requirements of the National Forest

Management Act of 1976, the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Active management is also needed to maintain or move toward desired conditions, including to restore forest ecosystems; maintain recreation opportunities; enhance the management of threatened and endangered species; reduce the threat of uncharacteristic wildfires to communities, and maintain the availability of forest products. A “hands off approach” was not identified as a need for change from the 1986 plan (see the “Purpose and Need for Change” section in chapter 1 of the Final Environmental Impact Statement) and therefore, this topic did not drive alternative development.

## **No New Road Construction**

Some public comments requested that, during the plan revision process, no new roads or unauthorized routes be added to the transportation system. The land management plan provides a framework to guide new road construction to reduce impacts to sensitive resources. Potential changes or additions to the forests’ transportation system are not plan level decisions and would be evaluated in separate analysis through implementation of the Travel Management Rule (73 FR 74689). As a result, this alternative was dropped from detailed consideration.

## **My Decision**

I have selected the Modified Proposed Action Alternative for the new Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The new plan will:

- Contribute nearly 1,300 jobs and generate up to \$45 million in income annually to local communities.
- Provide for sustainable levels of tourism, recreation, mining, livestock grazing, and fuelwood cutting, making timber and other forest products available for the public either through personal-use permits or commercial sales, and promoting available forest product use as a result of forest management activities.
- Preserve open space in range management, wildlife, and scenery by managing working landscapes (e.g., grazing allotments) as open space, emphasizing wildlife habitat linkages that extend across land ownership boundaries, emphasizing healthy rangelands for grazing, and emphasizing aesthetic and recreational benefits of vast, open natural landscapes.
- Identify areas where improved access is necessary but currently nonexistent or limited. The new plan presents a full suite of plan components to guide the resolution of the legal status deficiencies on 40 to 50 existing roads and trails in the next ten years.
- Provide mining exploration and extraction that supports employment opportunities and additional income to the state and local economy.
- Provide desired conditions that all mineral exploration and mining activities, such as the Rosemont Copper Mine and proposed projects similar to Rosemont in the Patagonia Mountains south of Rosemont on Forest lands, are operating in environmentally sound ways through protection and mitigation measures, including adequate post-mining reclamation assurances, to minimize environmental impacts to other national forest resources.
- Support collaboration with local, county, and State governments, tribes, other federal agencies, and the public for most resource and social elements to address the need for more effective management and for accomplishing work with the help of others through improved relationships.

- Maintain and improve motorized and nonmotorized access to the Forest through acquisition of rights-of-way.
- Provide a wide range of designated visitor experiences that satisfy visitor expectations with approximately 60 percent of the Forest managed for quiet recreation, 38 percent managed for motorized access, and less than 1 percent managed for developed facilities.
- Provide guidance for three types of management areas (Land Use Zones, wilderness areas, and other special designations) and geographic subdivisions called Ecosystem Management Areas. These areas were assigned based on administrative and user needs, and public comments.
- Provide guidance for managing 16 river segments that meet eligibility criteria for future designation as wild, scenic, and recreational rivers. Outstanding remarkable values will be preserved in these segments that qualify for wild, scenic, or recreational river classification.
- Recommend approximately 108,890 acres to Congress for Wilderness designation based on public interest in additional wilderness areas. These recommendations support the local economy by providing additional outfitter/guide opportunities managed through special use permits. The proposed action includes Mount Graham (61,315 acres) and Ku Chish (26,245 acres). In addition, Chiricahua Addition North (5,012 acres), and Whetstone (16,317 acres) are recommended to be incorporated as discussed in the plan. Some of these areas are adjacent to existing wilderness, others are standalone; however all will be managed to retain their wilderness characteristics until a congressional decision on wilderness designation is made.
- Recommend four research natural areas (3,284 acres) and one other Special Management Area (25,764 acres) highlights a diverse assemblage of migratory and year-round wildlife. Recent research has found that Cave Creek Canyon harbors the United States' densest known population of breeding raptors. World-class birding is a highlight of the area.
- Move vegetation towards desired conditions, reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfires, and protect vegetation from potential effects of future site-specific management actions. This includes community-specific objectives guiding management, through planned and unplanned ignitions and mechanical treatments, to maintain species diversity and an appropriate diversity of open conditions and structural classes (Reynolds et al. 2013).<sup>4</sup>
- Protect and improve air, soil and water resources that support aquatic and terrestrial habitat and contribute to high levels of biodiversity including fens, bogs, springs, and over 2,500 plant and animal species.
- Protect and improve biophysical habitats including caves, abandoned mines, and adits through objectives and desired conditions when management action is needed to sustain and /or improve conditions.
- Provide for the viability of all species through habitat desired conditions needed by those species, and standards, guidelines and objectives that address species-specific needs.

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<sup>4</sup> Reynolds, R.T.; A.J. Sanchez Meador; J.A. Youtz; T. Nicolet; M.S. Matonis; P.L. Jackson; D. G. DeLorenzo; and A.D. Graves. (2013). Restoring the composition and structure in southwestern frequent-fire forests: a science-based framework for improving ecosystem resiliency. General Technical Report RMRS-GTR-310.

- Restore and remediate degraded resources and sustain healthy ecosystems into the future by addressing the resource threats posed by invasive, nonnative plants and animals, and reducing threats to aquatic species.
- Improve resiliency and increase capacity to adapt for affected resources to changing biological, chemical, and physical conditions such as drought and atmospheric warming.

I have considered how the revised plan responds to the concerns of State, local, and tribal governments, public comments, internal management concerns, and national direction and policy. My decision is based on the management direction in the revised plan, the analysis of effects disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, and the planning record in its entirety. The decision components are fully supported by the environmental analysis documented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, as required by law and regulation. This decision applies only to National Forest System lands on the Coronado National Forest. It does not apply to any other Federal, State, or private lands, although the effects of these lands and the effects of my decision on lands surrounding the Coronado National Forest were considered.

## Components of the Decision

Components of plan decisions are outlined in the National Forest Management Act (1976) and Forest Service implementing regulations at 36 CFR Part 219. A plan establishes a framework for future decision making by outlining a broad, interdisciplinary program for achieving the desired conditions of the National Forest. A plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations. However, the plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities that are consistent with the plan.

The decisions I am making in this Record of Decision for the new Coronado Forest Plan are as follows:

### **Establishment of forestwide multiple-use goals (characterized by desired conditions) and objectives (1982 Rule, Section 219.11 (b))**

Forestwide goals, termed in this plan as desired conditions, are found in chapter 2 of the revised plan. While the plan addresses multiple uses and values of the Coronado National Forest, the desired conditions emphasize:

1. Livestock grazing and wood fiber harvest activities contribute to aspects of the social, economic, and cultural structure and stability of rural communities.
2. The composition, density, structure, and mosaic of vegetative conditions minimize the threat of uncharacteristic wildfire hazard to local communities and ecosystems.
3. Enhancing Madrean Encinal woodland with fires of low and mixed severity and occur between April and July, resulting in an overstory canopy of less than 20 percent on about 60 percent of the landscape.
4. Water quality, stream channel stability, and aquatic habitats retain their inherent resilience to natural and other disturbances, including climate variability and change.
5. Access to areas where it is currently nonexistent or limited.

Objectives provide ways of achieving the desired conditions through specific actions and are established in chapter 2 of the plan for a full array of resources, uses, goods and services. Desired conditions are also established in chapter 3 for the management areas described above.

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### **Establishment of forestwide management requirements (standards and guidelines) (1982 Rule, Section 219.27)**

Forestwide standards and guidelines are found in chapter 2 of the revised plan. Standards are limitations on actions or thresholds that are not to be exceeded. Guidelines are requirements that must be followed unless a different management action demonstrably achieves the same intent as the guideline. After careful review, I believe that the standards and guidelines provide sufficient requirements for management, provide for resource protection, and reflect the intent of the revised plan. To simplify the planning document and to keep it up to date, laws, policies, Forest Service Manual, and Forest Service Handbook direction or other regional directives are incorporated by reference from the original source and are not duplicated in the plan.

### **Establishment of management prescriptions and associated standards and guidelines (1982 Rule, Section 219.11 (c))**

The revised plan provides direction for management areas that have specific management direction that differs from the general forest. Management areas are described in chapter 3 of the plan and are mapped in chapter 4 by geographic subdivisions, called ecosystem management areas. The management areas span a continuum of management emphasis from passive approach with little human-caused change to more active management with substantially more human-caused change designed to sustain the social, economic, and sociological attributes of the Forest. The management area allocations were the primary difference between the three action alternatives. Two types of management areas are identified: designated areas and land use zones.

Designated areas (also known as special areas) are lands given special designation through statute or a preexisting administrative process due to their unique or special characteristics. They are designated to ensure protection of specific biological and zoological communities. The plan provides desired conditions, standards and guidelines for 19 special management areas which includes research natural areas, botanical, zoological, and other special areas. Research natural areas are areas that have been designated to be permanently protected and maintained in natural condition, so they may serve as experimental research controls and monitoring sites for the particular ecosystem they represent. These areas are to be used for education. Botanical and zoological areas are designated for a special feature such as a rare plant or animal. Several of these areas overlap with designated wilderness areas.

Land use zones are delineated to aid in management and provide plan direction for specific sites. Land use zones established in the revised plan are wild backcountry, roaded backcountry, developed recreation, and motorized recreation.

Land within the Coronado National Forest may be assigned to more than one management area. For example, Finger Rock Canyon Research Natural Area is almost entirely within Pusch Ridge Wilderness. In such cases, the most restrictive plan direction would apply to the area of overlap. Table 1 (next page) displays the management area allocations included in the decision.

### **Determination of land that is suitable for timber production (1982 Rule, Section 219.14) and establishment of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of timber (1982 Rule, Section 219.16)**

The determination of lands suitable for timber production is found in chapter 5 of the revised plan. The suitability and allowable sale quantity analysis is found in Appendix C of the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

The land area designated suitable for timber production on the Coronado National Forest is zero acres because the Coronado has zero acres for timber production, zero acres for long-term sustained yield calculation, and zero allowable sale quantity. Lands having potential commercial-grade timber are located at very high elevations and are isolated and difficult to access, making it extremely unlikely for a single processing facility to develop a feasible business model that could incorporate most timbered lands, therefore it is not cost efficient in meeting timber production objectives.

### **Recommendations for non-wilderness allocations and recommendations for wilderness status (1982 Rule, Section 219.7)**

During the analysis process leading to this decision, a total of about 417,485 acres in 33 areas were found to have wilderness potential. After considering the public value of wilderness and reviewing the suitability evaluations in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, I am recommending to Congress the addition of 108,890 acres for addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System. This includes Mount Graham (61,315 acres), Ku Chish (26,245 acres), Chiricahua Addition North (5,012 acres), and Whetstone (16,317 acres). Existing wilderness areas are utilized by local outfitter/guides to offer recreational tourism experiences that are administered through special use permits. Additional recommended wilderness areas could expand these opportunities.

My recommendation is similar to what was included in the 1986 plan for the addition of Mount Graham Recommended Wilderness Area (currently known as Mount Graham Wilderness Study Area). This recommendation is carried forward because the area received high rankings for capability. Although this area ranked medium for availability and low for need, it is recommended largely based on the existing congressional status as a wilderness study area. As such, this area has been consistently managed to preserve wilderness character since its congressional designation in the Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984.

Ku Chish is recommended for wilderness designation because it ranked highly for both capability and availability of the area as potential wilderness. Based on the evaluation, the areas rugged condition and high quality wilderness character combined with its manageability made it the strongest candidate for recommendation.

Chiricahua Addition North and Whetstone are recommended for wilderness designation because both these areas have attributes that are fitting as wilderness and because interest in these areas was supportive from local collaborative groups. These areas both ranked high for availability although low for need in the wilderness evaluation. Chiricahua Addition North ranked medium for capability although the adjacency to existing wilderness provides for better manageability of the existing wilderness. Whetstone ranked high for capability due to this area being surrounded by Forest Service lands. Both areas have unique rock formations and spectacular views further contributing to their wilderness characteristics.

Until Congress considers this recommendation, the plan has management direction for these areas to improve and/or maintain wilderness character. This recommendation is a preliminary administrative recommendation that will receive further review and possible modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation.

**Table 1. Land use zones, wilderness areas, and other special management areas and acreages**

<b>Management Area</b>	<b>Acres Allocated by Proposed Action</b>
<b>Land Use Zones</b>	
Roaded Backcountry	595,787
Wild Backcountry	596,317
Developed Recreation	36,784
Motorized Recreation	4,862
<b>Wilderness, Recommended Wilderness, and Wilderness Study Areas</b>	
Wilderness	338,318
Recommended Wilderness (includes Ku Chish, Mount Graham, Whetstone and Chiricahua Addition North)	108,890
Bunk Robinson Wilderness Study Area	19,062
Whitmire Canyon Wilderness Study Area	12,163
<b>Special Management Areas</b>	
Proposed Cave Creek Canyon Birds of Prey	25,764
South Fork of Cave Creek Zoological-Botanical Area	786
Pole Bridge Research Natural Area	460
Proposed Pole Bridge Research Natural Area Extension	122
Guadalupe Canyon	3,436
Wild Chile Botanical Area	2,836
Goodding Research Natural Area	540
Proposed Goodding Research Natural Area Extension	1,673
Sabino Canyon Recreation Area	1,423
Elgin Research Natural Area	245
Proposed Canelo Research Natural Area	386
Appleton-Whittell Research Ranch	1,746
Goudy Canyon	558
Wet Canyon Talus Snail	1,218
Mount Graham Astrophysical & Biological Research Area	2,937
Bighorn Sheep Management Area	21,184
Butterfly Peak Research Natural Area	1,058
Proposed Finger Rock Canyon Research Natural Area	1,103
Santa Catalina Research Natural Area (proposed reduction from original 4,040 acres)	634

\*Acres do not include private inholdings or lands of other ownerships

### **Recommendations for wild and scenic rivers or other special use designations as appropriate (1982 Rule, Section 219.7)**

The eligibility review process for wild and scenic rivers completed under this forest plan revision analysis resulted in finding no new rivers or river segments eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. There are 16 eligible wild, scenic, and recreational rivers on the Coronado, all of which were identified in a 1993 inventory and described in “Resource Information Report: Potential Wild, Scenic, and Recreational River Designation, National Forests of Arizona” (USDA FS 1993). In 2008, the 16 river segments were reevaluated, and they all remain eligible. More information is available in the Eligible Wild, Scenic, and recreational Rivers section of the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

As previously described, the revised plan provides management direction in chapters 2 and 3 for designated areas that have been established through statute or a preexisting administrative process because of their unique or special characteristics.

### **Designation of lands suitable for grazing and browsing (1982 Rule, Section 219.20)**

Approximately 97 percent of the Coronado National Forest is suitable for livestock grazing. The areas designated unsuitable for grazing include research natural areas and recommended research natural areas. The plan sets the framework for site-specific determinations relating to allotment management, such as the grazing systems (e.g., season of use, permitted livestock numbers, forage use levels) to meet desired conditions and the range developments needed to implement those systems. The “Range Management Section” in chapter 2 and the “Grazing Capability and Suitability” section in chapter 5 of the revised plan and Appendix E of the Final Environmental Impact Statement contain more information about the grazing suitability and capability determinations on the Coronado National Forest.

### **Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements (1982 Rule, Section 219.11 (d))**

Monitoring and evaluation requirements are found in chapter 6 of the revised plan. Specific monitoring questions are identified regarding achievement of desired conditions and objectives or meeting regulatory requirements. The monitoring strategy strives to be realistic in terms of budget and capacity, provides for robust study designs, and statistically valid conclusions, and will facilitate adapting management in response to results and new information. Application of this monitoring strategy will inform achievement of the desired conditions and objectives, and serve as the basis for adjusting the Land and Resource Management Plan.

### **Determination of lands administratively available for oil and gas leasing (36 CFR 228.102 (d))**

This determination is not a part of the revised plan.

## **Rationale for My Decision**

My decision to select the Modified Proposed Action Alternative as the new Coronado Forest Plan is based on a careful and reasoned comparison of the environmental consequences of and responses to issues and concerns for each alternative. I selected the Modified Proposed Action Alternative because it represents the best mix and balance of management strategies that:



- is responsive to the diverse needs, issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed by State and local governments, tribes, other Federal agencies, organizations, and the public;
- manages land uses in ways that are ecologically, socially, and economically sustainable;
- promote sound land stewardship in partnership with local communities to conserve rural character;
- establishes ambitious but achievable objectives for maintenance and improvement of ecosystem health, managed recreation, and community-forest interaction;
- meets the purpose of and need for action by addressing the priority needs for change and major themes that drove plan revision; and
- provides the direction necessary for moving the Forest' resources toward desired conditions while including measures to protect sensitive ecological and cultural elements of the Forest;

The new Coronado Forest Plan will provide direction and guidance for accomplishing the following management activities.

### **Contributing to Social and Economic Sustainability**

The revised plan contributes to social and economic sustainability. Analysis shows that it will contribute approximately 1,300 jobs to the local economy and \$45 million in labor income primarily through recreation and livestock grazing.

### **Preserving Open Space**

The revised plan identifies open space as a desired condition to sustain biological diversity and ecological processes and help to preserve the rural cultural heritage in the planning area. To determine lands to be acquired or conveyed, the Coronado is more focused on specific resources and less specific to location on the landscape.

### **Managing Mining Operations**

The revised plan supports the mandate of the 1872 Mining Act. The Forest Service must consider all proposals for minerals exploration and mining on public land regardless of which alternative is implemented. Large-scale mining actions on the Coronado provide a contribution to the social and economic development of local communities while minimizing impacts to other Forest resources.

### **Increasing Access**

The revised plan aims to increase the number of permanent legal access routes to and within the Coronado National Forest by resolving legal status deficiencies of 40 to 50 existing and proposed national forest roads and trails every 10 years.

### **Providing for Tribal Uses**

The revised plan provides for traditional tribal uses such as the collection of medicinal plants, wild plant foods, basketry materials, and fuelwood; tribal members' access to sacred sites for traditional ceremonies and rituals; and maintaining or improving the integrity of sacred sites.

## **Providing and Managing Recreation Opportunities**

The revised plan provides a mix of recreation opportunities with a balanced approach in providing developed, dispersed, motorized, and non-motorized recreation opportunities. This alternative provides land use zones that better reflect public use patterns and activities in various areas. Land use zones complement recreation opportunity spectrum settings by responding to public concerns about the need for “quiet” recreation settings, acknowledge the popular recreation areas on the Coronado where management of recreation is most intense, and provide areas for noise-generating activities, such as off-highway vehicle use. My decision does affect future options to consider designating additional miles or areas for motorized use following site-specific analysis. The revised plan provides a balance to accommodate reasonable assurances of motorized and non-motorized recreation choices while protecting forest resources.

## **Recommending Wilderness**

The revised plan recommends 108,890 acres for addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System. This includes Mount Graham (61,315 acres), Ku Chish (26,245 acres), Chiricahua Addition North (5,012 acres), and Whetstone (16,317 acres). As described in the “Response to Public Comment” section below, public opinion regarding wilderness recommendation varies widely. I recognize the complexity of public concerns over recommended wilderness and considered public comments related to recommended wilderness boundary changes and new recommended wilderness inclusion between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements. Some commenters wanted more wilderness while others wanted no additional wilderness. I selected the Chiricahua Addition North and Whetstone from Alternative 1 because they had public support and because they contain outstanding wilderness characteristics. Mount Graham is a recommendation carried forward from the 1986 plan based largely on the existing congressional status as a wilderness study area. I recognize that Graham County Supervisors are in opposition of this recommendation on the basis that they do not support any restriction of uses or activities. Recent conversations with them have emphasized that important economic opportunities such as livestock grazing will continue in recommended wilderness areas. Ku Chish is recommended for wilderness designation due to its rugged condition and high quality wilderness character combined with its manageability. Wilderness is highly valued by many and represents deeply held values and beliefs. Yet, recommendation and potential Congressional designation of lands for wilderness will necessarily result in losses of other opportunities such as mountain biking within these areas. The revised plan provides a balance of opportunities in response to the broad range of public values.

## **Providing Research Natural Areas**

The revised plan recommendation for designation of a new research natural area previously identified by the 1986 plan (Canelo), extension of two other research natural areas (Goodding and Pole Ridge), and a new recommended research natural area (Finger Rock) would enhance the preservation and conservation of these biologically rich lands. Over a decade of research has already been conducted on this area regarding climate change. The primary objective of this area is to continue climate change research. These areas total approximately 3,285 acres and serve as experimental research controls and monitoring sites for the ecosystem they represent providing opportunities for research, observation, and study.

## **Improving Vegetation**

The revised plan will effectively maintain or move vegetation towards desired conditions by providing direction to improve vegetation conditions which will increase resistance and resiliency

to disturbance, including climate change. The revised plan contains desired conditions for forest composition, structure, density, and objectives for management activities that will move vegetation towards these conditions. Standards and guidelines protect components of vegetation, providing for habitat diversity, and maintaining and enhancing scenic integrity. The analysis in the Final Environmental Impact Statement provided a foundation for how terrestrial vegetation may influence other resources such as wildlife habitat, aquatic resources, and fire risk (consistent with GTR-310, Reynolds et al. 2013).<sup>5</sup>

## **Managing Wildland Fire**

The revised plan allows the use of planned and unplanned natural ignitions and mechanical treatments in all vegetation communities except desert communities. In desert communities wildland fire will not be utilized as a management tool except as a strategy to control invasive vegetation in limited areas where appropriate. The direction also emphasizes hazardous fuels reduction in the wildland-urban interface through landscape-scale planning for wildfire across jurisdictional boundaries, support for community wildfire protection plans, and education of property owners about defensible space. Treatment of 5,000 to 10,000 acres annually in the wildland-urban interface through both mechanical and wildland fire (planned and unplanned ignitions) will maintain or move vegetation towards desired conditions in the wildland-urban interface to protect communities and improve public safety.

## **Promoting Healthy Watersheds**

The revised plan promotes healthy watersheds through desired conditions, and objectives that protect and improve soil, water resources, riparian, and upland vegetation conditions. The plan will improve viability of aquatic species and the climate resiliency by maintaining a more complex ecosystem resulting from the objectives to apply for ten instream flow water rights on streams and the completion of three stream restoration projects. The additional instream flow water rights and stream restoration projects will provide for the recovery of plant and/or animal species including benefiting aquatic species.

## **How the Modified Proposed Action Compares to the Other Alternatives**

I selected the Modified Proposed Action Alternative rather than the No Action Alternative because the No Action Alternative does not address the needs for change identified in the Analysis of the Management Situation. The current plan has no articulated desired conditions for the Coronado National Forest vegetation communities. There are very few desired conditions for other resources. After reviewing the Final Environmental Impact Statement and summary in Table 7 of the statement, it is clear to me that The No Action Alternative is generally the poorest of all the alternatives in terms of its ability to achieve desired conditions.

I selected the Modified Proposed Action Alternative rather than Alternative 1 for several reasons. Although the Modified Proposed Action Alternative and Alternative 1 both received “very good” ratings for all five Need for Change topics, I felt the Modified Proposed Action Alternative better met the needs of all recreational activities, including mountain biking. Alternative 1 would increase areas managed for wilderness characteristics by approximately 14 percent, which could exclude some user groups because motorized and mechanized uses are prohibited in wilderness.

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<sup>5</sup> Reynolds, R.T.; A.J. Sanchez Meador; J.A. Youtz; T. Nicolet; M.S. Matonis; P.L. Jackson; D. G. DeLorenzo; and A.D. Graves. (2013). Restoring the composition and structure in southwestern frequent-fire forests: a science-based framework for improving ecosystem resiliency. General Technical Report RMRS-GTR-310.

Because of restrictive standards and guidelines for motorized and mechanical uses in wilderness, Alternative 1 would marginally increase the cost and impede the accomplishment of forest health improvement projects that would benefit recreation settings, and increase the complexity of fire management. This is most problematic in recommended wilderness areas that are highly departed from desirable conditions, have heavy fuel loads, and high vegetation densities.

I selected the Modified Proposed Action Alternative rather than Alternative 2 for several reasons. Alternative 2 would have the greatest negative effect on the desert, grassland, interior chaparral, and Madrean encinal woodland, and Madrean pine-oak woodland vegetation communities due to increased motorized use. These communities account for almost 94 percent of the Coronado. Alternative 2 had the greatest potential negative effects on both soils and water due to potential for increased compaction and erosion and runoff resulting from vehicle use and ground disturbance. Alternative 2 was less successful at fostering adaptation and resiliency to the effects of climate change than the Modified Proposed Action Alternative. Alternative 2 would have a positive effect on motorized recreation by increasing the allocation of land for motorized uses however this would increase the potential impacts to ecosystems and reduce the degree of quiet recreation available. Further, one recommended wilderness would be carried forward (as identified from the 1986 plan). Overall, Alternative 2 was rated as poor for meeting the Ecosystem Restoration and Resiliency, Visitor Experiences, and Communities, Collaboration, and Partnerships “Need for Change” topics.

The Modified Proposed Action Alternative is responsive to the Forest Service’s National Strategic Plan (2015-2020) and meets our legal obligations to the people and environment that surrounds them. The full implementation rate for the new plan could require higher funding levels in some areas than those currently allocated; however, I believe the management direction changes envisioned in the new plan are attainable under current budget levels. The achievement of desired conditions and outputs in some areas, however, may be prolonged or reduced if future budgets decrease.

In summary, I believe the Modified Proposed Action Alternative sets the framework for future decisions better than the other alternatives because it best addresses the needs for change to the current plan. It is overall best in achieving desired conditions and therefore best provides for social, economic, and ecological sustainability on the Coronado National Forest.

My conclusion is based on a review of the record that shows thorough incorporation of relevant scientific information, a consideration of opposing views, and the acknowledgment of incomplete or unavailable information, scientific uncertainty, and risk.

## Response to Public Concerns

Many stakeholders shared their concerns and preferences during the collaboration and public involvement for the Coronado National Forest plan revision. I have made my decision to select the Modified Proposed Action Alternative with due consideration of the input from those diverse stakeholders. This section describes the key concerns and comments expressed during the plan revision process and how my decision responds to those concerns.

**Keep Things the Same** – An overwhelming response by the public and stakeholders was to keep things the same, so the Coronado could continue to provide the experiences, goods and services that are currently available.

**Grazing** – Some commenters want to eliminate, reduce, or increase livestock grazing. Some commenters question the range capability and suitability determinations. Alternatives to eliminate reduce, or increase livestock grazing were considered in the environmental impact statement but eliminated from detailed study because elimination is not consistent with the multiple-use mission of the Forest Service and stocking decisions are made at the project level. The plan was reviewed; the guidelines to balance livestock grazing with available forage and manage towards desired conditions are considered adequate to manage livestock grazing. The Coronado National Forest contributes to the local economy in both jobs and income based on utilization of national forest grazing allotments. The Coronado followed national and regional guidance to complete the capability and suitability determinations.

**Mining** – Some commenters feel the Forest Service should prohibit open pit mining or extraction activities, such as Rosemont Mine, to preserve the long-term ecological and economical sustainability of the region. The revised forest plan contains standards and guidelines aimed at minimizing adverse impacts from mineral extraction and mining activities on sensitive forest resources. Most of the guidance for mining is governed by law, regulation, and policy, which are outside of the scope of the forest plan. As stated in the plan, it is Forest Service policy to support responsible, environmentally sound energy and mineral development and reclamation on the Coronado National Forest.

**Access** – Public access was one of the primary concerns expressed by the public as something they wanted to see protected. The challenge is that of the 300 or so access points to the National Forest, only 1/3 of them have permanent legal status. To address this issue, the new plan presents a full suite of plan components to guide the resolution of the legal status deficiencies on 40 to 50 existing roads and trails in the next 10 years.

**Open Space** – The theme of preservation of open space was revealed through recognition of major conservation efforts of neighboring land owners and jurisdictions. In particular, the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, a landmark conservation plan designed to preserve endangered species in Pima County. Also, the Malpai Borderlands Group which has effectively provided incentives to preclude development and fragmentation on over 1 million acres adjacent to the Coronado National Forest. These efforts benefit the Forest Service goals for social and ecological sustainability, and the new forest plan presents plan components that lend support to neighbors who choose to preserve open space and rural cultural heritage.

**Cooperation with Tribes** – Tribal comments showed support for Alternative 1, which provides additional recommended wilderness areas than the Modified Proposed Action Alternative. Tribes also commented that the Coronado National Forest should include a Memorandum of Understanding with the various tribes. I agree that establishing a memorandum with the tribes is beneficial. Additional language is added to the plan to cooperatively develop a memorandum with neighboring tribes for routine tribal consultation, policy development, proposed plans, projects, programs, and national forest activities that have a potential to affect tribal interest.

**Wilderness** – Some comments show support for and against the amount of recommended wilderness. Some preferred keeping the parcels of land for multiple use (mountain biking in particular), while others pushed for much more recommended wilderness (alternative 1). The amount I recommend for wilderness is based on suitability evaluations and public input. Chiricahua Addition North will improve manageability of the Chiricahua Wilderness. With these additions, the amount of designated wilderness, study areas and recommended wilderness areas is approximately 26 percent of Coronado National Forest lands. The Coronado's

wilderness evaluation process is consistent with the 1982 Planning Rule, chapter 70 of the directives, and regional guidance.

**Aquatic and Riparian Resources** – Some commenters want more direction to protect water, riparian, and aquatic ecosystems using a watershed approach and additional standards and guidelines. A review of the plan verified it contains desired conditions, standards, and guidelines to adequately protect water resources, riparian and aquatic habitat. The plan contains a guideline to utilize the watershed condition framework and classification system to prioritize and assess watersheds. Furthermore, watershed restoration action plans should be used to guide completion of essential watershed projects.

**Cave and Karst Resources** – The Central Arizona Grotto of the National Speleological Society requested that we add additional direction for management of caves and karsts. I agree that a cave and karst management plan is needed and the Coronado National Forest is currently developing such a plan. Additional management guidelines are being developed in coordination with cave and karst stakeholders such as the Central Arizona Grotto of the National Speleological Society, through the Cave Management Plan process. In addition, a cave and karst management guide has recently been developed in collaboration with local Grottos. The revised forest plan incorporates this guide by reference.

**Climate Change** – Some commenters support how we address climate change while others do not. Some concerns request a more thorough discussion and disclosure of the effects of climate change on multiple resources; include management strategies to adapt to climate change and this affects ranchers and adjacent land owners. The revised forest plan contains a section outlining desired conditions and management approaches to help address climate change that follows regional direction. Further, plan components are found in the “Vegetation Communities” and “Natural Water Sources” sections that are designed to adapt those resources to climate change. The Forest Service addresses climate change at the project level in all National Environmental Policy Act assessments, and any potential effects of Forest Service activities to ranchers or adjacent land owners would be analyzed and disclosed at that point.

I appreciate all the stakeholder’s constructive contributions to the development of the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. That input has resulted in an improved plan that will serve the Coronado National Forest, its priceless resources, and the public well into the future.

## Environmentally Preferable Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality has defined the “environmentally preferable” alternative as: “...the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in the National Environmental Policy Act’s section 101. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources.”

The Modified Proposed Action Alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative. This alternative’s desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines best provide the direction and management flexibility necessary to maintain and improve ecosystem health, manage recreation, and facilitate community-forest interaction. The Modified Proposed Action Alternative achieves maintenance of a safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing Forest better than the other alternatives because it provides the best mix of resource utilization, active and passive management, and motorized and non-motorized recreation uses along with the

safeguards provided by standards and guidelines for maintaining water quality, scenery, and wildlife habitat. The Modified Proposed Action Alternative provides increased levels of recommended wilderness with 26 percent of the Coronado National Forest being currently designated or recommended wilderness, or wilderness study areas recommending the best of our backcountry areas for this designation. It also ensures the protection of soil and watershed function; provides for threatened, endangered, sensitive, rare, and narrow endemic species; protects historic and cultural resources, and mitigates the effects of climate change.

The Modified Proposed Action Alternative facilitates restoration of the structure, composition, and processes of the Forest's vegetation types and protects and restores rare and unique resources that support important habitats. This alternative outlines appropriate desired conditions at multiple scales and provides climate change direction for each vegetation community. The Modified Proposed Action Alternative promotes resilient ecosystems by reducing the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire and is found to have the greatest ability to maintain viable wildlife populations over time, allowing wildlife species to cope with climate change. When compared to Alternative 1, the Modified Proposed Action Alternative is better able to meet desired conditions for vegetation structure, composition and function due to increased ability to modify vegetation through mechanical means. Compared to Alternative 2, the Modified Proposed Action Alternative lessens the negative impacts of motorized recreation and better facilitates management under climate change.

## Net Public Benefits

The 1982 National Forest Management Act implementing regulations (36 CFR 219.1) state that plans "...shall provide for multiple use and sustained yield of goods and services...in a way that maximizes long term net public benefits..." Section 219.3 defines net public benefits as "...the long term value to the nation of all outputs and positive effects (benefits) less all associated inputs and negative effects (costs) whether they can be quantitatively valued or not. Net public benefits are measured by both quantitative and qualitative criteria rather, than a single measure or index."

There are two economic analyses required by the 1982 Rule Provisions—economic impact analysis and financial efficiency analysis. Economic impact analysis estimates the employment and labor income consequences and compares the relative effects of the alternatives. All alternatives provide the same level of employment and income. Financial efficiency analysis compares forest expenditures and revenues for the expected life (10 to 15 years) of the Forest Plan and the efficiency measure is present net value. Present net value is the difference between program revenues and program expenditures over a 10 year period, using a four percent discount rate. Present net value is negative and the same dollar amount for all alternatives. With no differences between alternatives for economic impacts or financial efficiency I chose the Modified Proposed Action Alternative based on consideration for how the revised plan responded to public comment, internal management concerns, and national direction and policy.

## Science Consistency

The revised plan contains a strong framework for adapting management of Coronado National Forest resources as new scientific information becomes available and plan monitoring reveals new or changing needs. Furthermore, I find that science was considered and applied throughout the revision process. Peer reviewed science was used whenever available, reliable, and applicable throughout the assessment process, the development of the plan, and preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement. Extensive site-specific peer reviewed literature was available and used in the development of many plan components for many resource areas. In addition to

published scientific literature and reports, the Coronado National Forest solicited input from subject matter experts, used state-of-the-art ecological modeling, including the Forest Vegetation Simulator and the Vegetation Dynamics Development Tool.

I find this decision to be consistent with the application of the best available scientific information used throughout the plan development process during assessment of the original 1986 plan for needs for change to better reflect management of the Coronado National Forest, during plan development and evaluation, and during development of the plan monitoring program. Scientific conclusions are drawn from well-supported data sources, and data availability is disclosed. No unproven or controversial data or methods are used in analyses. Sources of information are referenced, and syntheses do not go beyond what the data indicate.

## Compatibility with Goals of Other Public Agencies and Indian Tribes

Forest Service planning regulations require the agency to consider other Federal, State, and local government and tribal plans and policies. As part of the collaboration effort in developing the revised Plan, the Coronado National Forest engaged in a number of discussions with these entities throughout the duration of the plan revision effort. The new plan was developed collaboratively and was coordinated with Federal, State, and local agencies including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and local government and community leaders. Consultation with affiliated tribes ensured the plan components reflect tribal concerns and needs with respect to the national forest. Appendix B of the Final Environmental Impact Statement details the collaboration and coordination between the Coronado National Forest and other public agencies and tribes throughout the plan revision process and that no conflicts were identified.

## Environmental Justice

Executive Order 12898 (59 Federal Register 7629, 1994) directs Federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and low-income populations in the local communities. I have determined, from the analysis disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, that the revised plan is in compliance with Executive Order 12898.

There are high concentrations of American Indian and Hispanic/Latino residents within the area addressed by the plan. In addition, according to the 2010 census, all of the counties within the planning area have higher percentages of persons living in poverty than the national average (13.8 percent) with the exception of Pinal County which has a poverty rate of 13.5 percent. The Final Environmental Impact Statement analyzed the potential impacts to these groups and identified no environmental justice consequences. Since all alternatives, including the plan, would continue to support similar levels of employment and income, they would not exacerbate the poverty rate or disproportionately worsen the economic well-being of low-income individuals. None of the alternatives were expected to disproportionately adversely impact racial and or ethnic minority individuals.

Because of the high proportion of minority populations and high poverty rates, decisionmakers on the Coronado National Forest will pay careful attention to the potential health and environmental impacts of management actions upon these groups. Overall, the themes that form the foundation of the revised plan (maintenance and improvement of ecosystem health, managed recreation, and community-forest interaction), should make the Coronado National Forest a healthy and



enjoyable place to work, reside near, or visit. Therefore, I find no disproportional effects to minority or low-income populations will occur from implementing the selected alternative.

## Consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Coronado National Forest prepared a biological assessment to evaluate the potential effects of the revised plan on federally proposed and listed species and, where appropriate, their critical habitats. The biological assessment analyzed the potential effects on a total of 27 species; this includes 24 listed species, 1 candidate species, and 2 species that have been extirpated but are either close and/or have habitat within the boundary of the Coronado National Forest. Additionally, where applicable, critical habitat is included in table 2 (next page).

The biological assessment determined that implementation of the plan *may affect, and is likely to adversely affect* 22 listed species that include the Jaguar, Mount Graham red squirrel, Ocelot, lesser long-nosed bat, Mexican spotted owl, western yellow-billed cuckoo, Sonoran tiger salamander, Chiricahua leopard frog, northern Mexican gartersnake, New Mexico ridge-nosed rattlesnake, Gila chub, Yaqui chub, Gila topminnow, Gila trout, Apache trout, Sonora chub, loach minnow, spokedace, Yaqui catfish, desert pupfish, Huachuca water umbel, and Pima pineapple cactus. It also determined the plan *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect* two listed species: Mexican long-nosed bat and Canelo Hill's ladies-tresses. For the extirpated Mexican gray wolf within the proposed 10j area and Northern Aplomado falcon, a determination of *not likely to jeopardize* was made.

For the one candidate species (roundtail chub) considered in the biological assessment, a determination of *not likely to jeopardize* was made.

The biological assessment determined that the implementation of the plan *may affect, and is likely to adversely affect critical habitat* for the jaguar, Mount Graham red squirrel, Mexican spotted owl, Chiricahua leopard frog, Gila chub, and Sonora chub, loach minnow, spokedace and Huachuca water umbel. If proposed critical habitat becomes designated for the western yellow-billed cuckoo and the Northern Mexican gartersnake, implementation of the plan *is not likely to result in destruction or adverse modification* of the habitat.

The biological assessment was transmitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on May 6, 2015 with a request for formal consultation, conferencing, and concurrence on the biological assessment's effects determinations. In an April 13, 2017 biological opinion, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with the determinations on the above list of species.

The proposed action described within the Coronado revised plan and associated biological assessment is a "framework programmatic action" as defined in 50 CFR 402.02, where framework programmatic action only establishes a framework for the development of specific future action(s) but does not authorize any future action(s). Under those circumstances, the programmatic action in and of itself does not result in incidental take of listed species. Because a framework programmatic action does not itself authorize any action to proceed, no take is anticipated to result, and, therefore, no incidental take statements were issued as part of the biological opinion. Furthermore, since there are no incidental take statements within the biological opinion, there are equally no implementing terms and conditions.

**Table 2. Federally listed, proposed, and candidate species; and designated or proposed critical habitats analyzed in the biological assessment**

Species or Habitat	Status	Determination
Jaguar ( <i>Panthera onca</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Jaguar critical habitat	(not applicable)	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Mount Graham red squirrel ( <i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus grahamensis</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Mount Graham red squirrel critical habitat	(not applicable)	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Ocelot ( <i>Leopardus pardalis</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Lesser long-nosed bat ( <i>Leptonycteris yerbabuenae</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Mexican long-nosed bat ( <i>Leptonycteris nivalis</i> )	Endangered	May affect, not likely to adversely affect
Mexican gray wolf ( <i>Canis lupus baileyi</i> )	Extirpated	Not likely to jeopardize within proposed 10(j) area.
Mexican spotted owl ( <i>Strix occidentalis lucida</i> )	Threatened	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Mexican spotted owl critical habitat	(not applicable)	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Western yellow-billed cuckoo ( <i>Coccyzus americanus occidentalis</i> )	Threatened	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Western yellow-billed cuckoo proposed critical habitat	(not applicable)	Not likely to result in destruction or adverse modification
Northern Aplomado falcon ( <i>Falco femoralis septentrionalis</i> )	Non-essential experimental in AZ and NM	Not likely to jeopardize
Gila chub ( <i>Gila intermedia</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Gila chub critical habitat	(not applicable)	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Yaqui chub ( <i>Gila purpurea</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Gila topminnow ( <i>Poeciliopsis occidentalis</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Gila trout ( <i>Oncorhynchus gilae</i> )	Threatened	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Apache trout ( <i>Oncorhynchus apache</i> )	Threatened	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Spikedace ( <i>Meda fulgida</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Spikedace critical habitat	(not applicable)	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Loach minnow ( <i>Tiaroga cobitis</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Loach minnow critical habitat	(not applicable)	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Sonora chub ( <i>Gila ditaenia</i> )	Threatened	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Sonora chub critical habitat	(not applicable)	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Roundtail chub ( <i>Gila robusta</i> )	Candidate	(If listed) Not likely to jeopardize
Yaqui catfish ( <i>Ictalurus pricei</i> )	Threatened	May affect, like to adversely affect
Desert pupfish ( <i>Cyprinodon macularius</i> )	Endangered	May affect, like to adversely affect
Canelo Hills ladies'-tresses ( <i>Spiranthes delitescens</i> )	Endangered	May affect, not likely to adversely affect
Huachuca water umbel ( <i>Lilaeopsis schaffneriana</i> var. <i>recurve</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Huachuca water umbel critical habitat	(not applicable)	May affect, likely to adversely affect
Pima pineapple cactus ( <i>Coryphantha scheeri</i> var. <i>robustispina</i> )	Endangered	May affect, likely to adversely affect

## Findings Related to Other Laws and Authorities

I have considered the statutes governing management of the Coronado National Forest, and I believe that this decision represents the best possible approach to fulfilling the current statutory duties of the USDA Forest Service. Following are summaries of how the revised Land and Resource Management Plan addresses the National Forest Management Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

### National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act requires the development, maintenance, amendment, and revision of land and resource management plans for each unit of the National Forest System. These plans help create a dynamic management system so an interdisciplinary approach to achieve integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic, and other sciences will be applied to all future actions on the unit (16 U.S.C. 1604(b), (f), (g), and (0)). Under the Act, the Forest Service is to ensure coordination of the multiple uses and sustained yield of products and services of the National Forest System (16 U.S.C. 1604(e)(1)).

The National Forest Management Act requires the Secretary of Agriculture to promulgate regulations for developing and maintaining forest plans. On April 9, 2012, the Department of Agriculture issued a final Planning Rule for National Forest System Land and Resource Management Planning (2012 Rule; see 77 FR 68 [21162-21276]). According to transition language of the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3), the responsible official may elect to complete and approve the plan revision in conformance with the provisions of a prior planning regulation (36 CFR part 299, published at 36 CFR parts 200 to 299, revised as of July 1, 2010). For this revision of the Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, I have elected to follow these provisions, referred to collectively in this document as the 1982 Planning Rule or 1982 Rule. References in this Record of Decision to sections of 1982 Planning Rule version of 36 CFR are indicated in the citations.

My review of the planning process, the Final Environmental Impact Statement, and the information provided in the Record of Decision indicates the revised plan and its preparation meet requirements for revising plans under the provisions of the 1982 Planning Rule, as allowed in the transition provisions of the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.17. Therefore, the revised plan is fully compliant with the National Forest Management Act.

### National Environmental Policy Act

The National Environmental Policy Act requires public involvement and consideration of potential environmental and social effects of implementing Federal actions. The environmental analysis and public involvement process outlined in the Final Environmental Impact Statement complies with the major elements of the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the Act (40 CFR 1500-1508). These include (1) considering a range of reasonable alternatives, (2) disclosing cumulative effects, (3) using best scientific information, (4) consideration of long-term and short-term effects, and (5) disclosure of unavoidable adverse effects.

The Coronado National Forest considered a range of alternatives in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and has compiled a comprehensive record of the effects relevant to the alternatives (long-term, short-term, and cumulative), considering best scientific information. The

revised plan adopts all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include provisions for providing the ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices. The revised plan includes monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to assure needed adjustments are made over time.

The revised plan does not represent an irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. The revised plan is a programmatic level planning effort and does not directly authorize any ground-disturbing activities or projects. Future ground-disturbing activities and projects will be consistent with this revised plan and subject to additional site-specific public involvement, environmental analysis, and pre-decisional review processes. Therefore, the revised plan is fully compliant with the National Environmental Policy Act and Council on Environmental Quality implementing regulations.

### **Endangered Species Act**

The purpose of the Endangered Species Act is to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered and threatened species depend may be conserved and to provide for the conservation of such endangered and threatened species. Section 7(a)(1) of the Act requires federal agencies to carry out programs for the conservation of listed species. In addition, the Endangered Species Act requires Federal agencies to ensure that any agency action does not jeopardize the continued existence of the species (ESA Section 7(a)(2)). The Act also requires the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Forest Service, respectively, to base the biological opinion and subsequent agency action on the use of best scientific and commercially available data [16 U.S.C. 1536(a)(2)].

In accordance with section 7(c) of the Act, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service identified the listed and proposed threatened or endangered species that may be present on the Coronado National Forest. As described above, a biological assessment was prepared for the revised plan and biological opinion rendered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding effects of implementing the plan on the threatened, endangered, and candidate species present on or near the national forest.

### **Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act**

The Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act requires National Forest lands to be administered to provide for multiple uses such as recreation, range, timber, watersheds, wildlife, and fisheries. The revised plan establishes a strong multiple use framework by providing desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines related to ecosystem structure, process, and function; wildlife and fisheries; recreation; traditional and cultural resources; livestock grazing; forest products; special uses; mining and minerals extraction; and energy transmission and development.

### **Clean Air Act**

According to the Clean Air Act of 1990 and the Organic Administration Act of 1897, the Forest Service has the responsibility to protect the air, land, and water resources from the impacts of air pollutants produced within the Forest Service boundaries and to work with states to protect air resources from degradation associated with the impacts of air pollution emitted outside of Forest Service lands. The revised plan contains desired conditions and a guideline to protect air quality. Furthermore, analysis of the effects plan implementation on air quality in the Final Environmental Impact Statement indicates that all alternatives are expected to achieve the desired conditions for

air quality; however, Alternative 2 would move the forest ecosystem toward desired conditions more slowly than the Modified Proposed Action, the No Action Alternative or Alternative 1.

### **Clean Water Act**

The revised plan contains desired conditions, standards, and guidelines to provide for the maintenance or improvement of water quality in the streams and water bodies of the Coronado National Forest. Overall, implementation of the revised plan is expected to contribute to protecting or restoring the physical, chemical, and biological integrity of water resources of the Coronado in accordance with the Clean Water Act.

### **National Historic Preservation Act**

The revised plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific projects. Projects undertaken in response to direction in the revised plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of cultural resources. The revised Plan contains direction for cultural resource management, including direction to integrate such management with other resource management activities. Since the revised plan does not authorize ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office under the National Historic Preservation Act is not required, per the 2003 programmatic agreement between the Forest Service's Southwestern Region and the State Historic Preservation Officers of Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. It is my determination that the revised Plan complies with the National Historic Preservation Act and other statutes that pertain to the protection of cultural resources.

### **Roadless Area Conservation Rule**

Management activities in Inventoried Roadless Areas are conditional on the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. During the development of the issues and alternatives in the Environmental Impact Statement, the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule was subject to litigation. However, on March 1, 2012, the nationwide injunction on implementing the rule was vacated and the Roadless Area Conservation Rule was placed back in effect. Consequently, the 2001 rule's restrictions on timber harvesting and road building apply to all inventoried roadless areas. However, zero acres of land area is designated suitable for timber production on the Coronado National Forest; therefore, the management direction in the plan is consistent with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

### **Project Consistency**

I am providing the following transition direction to ensure the orderly implementation of the revised forest plan that is made in this Record of Decision. The new direction will apply to all project decisions made on or after the effective date of this decision. The new direction does not apply to any projects that have had decisions made prior to the effective date of this decision. Projects currently under contract, permit, or other authorizing instrument are not affected by the decision; however, projects may be modified to adopt all or part of this direction where Forest Service managers deem appropriate. Reissuance of existing authorizations will be treated as new decisions, which must be consistent with the new direction described in the revised forest plan subject to valid existing rights.

As required by the National Forest Management Act and the 2012 Planning Rule, subject to valid existing rights, all projects and activities authorized by the Forest Service after approval of this revised plan must be consistent with the applicable plan components (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)) as

described at 36 CFR 219.15 of the 2012 Planning Rule. (Although the transition provisions at 36 CFR 219.17 of the 2012 Planning Rule allow revision of this plan under the 1982 regulations, subsequent projects or activities approved on units with plans revised under a prior planning rule must comply with the consistency requirement at 219.15 of the current rule.)

Consistency with the revised plan will be achieved by developing management activities that are designed specifically to achieve the desired conditions and objectives of the new plan and are guided by relevant standards and guidelines. To the extent practicable, documentation for such projects should identify the elements of the desired conditions, goals, or objectives to be achieved by the project. It should not be expected that all projects or activities would contribute to all desired conditions, goals, or objectives, but rather to a limited subset. It should also be recognized that some projects designed to contribute to some desired conditions, goals or objectives may have consequences considered adverse to the achievement of other desired conditions, goals, or objectives. In this situation, the responsible official for the project needs to identify and disclose these effects in the project documentation and make a decision that balances these considerations.

A project or activity approval document must describe how the project or activity is consistent with the plan by the criteria listed at 36 CFR 219.15(d) (2012 Planning Rule). Where a proposed project or activity would not be consistent with plan direction, the responsible official has the following options (36 CFR 219.15(c) 2012 Rule):

1. Modify the proposed project or activity to make it consistent with the applicable plan components;
2. Reject the proposal or terminate the project or activity;
3. Amend the plan so that the project or activity will be consistent with the plan as amended;
4. Amend the plan contemporaneously with the approval of the project or activity so that the project or activity will be consistent with the plan as amended. This amendment may be limited to apply only to the project or activity, and may be adopted at the same time as the approval of the project or activity (36 CFR 219.15(c)(4) 2012 Rule).

Any resource plans (such as travel management plans) developed by the Forest Service that apply to the resources or land areas within the planning area must be consistent with the plan components. Resource plans developed prior to plan decision (desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, suitability), must be evaluated for consistency with the plan and amended if necessary (36 CFR 219.15(e) 2012 Rule).

Authorizations for occupancy and use made before the final Record of Decision may proceed unchanged until time of reauthorization. At time of reauthorization, all permits, contracts, and other authorizing instruments must be made consistent with the revised plan, subject to existing valid rights, as provided at §219.15(d) (2012 Rule).

A forest plan is used as a direction source for future projects, plans, and assessments. It is not expected that this new direction be used to reevaluate or change decisions that have been made under the 1986 plan. A smooth and gradual transition to the new plan is anticipated, rather than one that forces an immediate reexamination or modification of all contracts, projects, permits, and other activities that are already in progress. As new project decisions, contracts, permits, renewals, and other activities are considered, conformance to the revised plan direction is expected.

## Plan Implementation

Throughout the life of the Plan the Forest will build community relations, foster partnerships and enhance tribal relations through a Community Leadership Vision. This vision by the Forest Supervisor:

- Provides for economic contributions to communities for mining, recreation, grazing and timber as a by-product to support vibrant communities.
- Paints the vision for furthering partnerships and expectations through collaboration and vibrant communities to expand and strengthen both tribal relationships and diverse community ties.
- Foresees how sustainable recreation is key to our visitor experiences and vibrant communities.
- Adds to valuing places and people across our 16 sky islands which touch upon both rural and urban communities, our special places including wilderness areas, research natural areas and the Arizona National Scenic Trail.
- Prepares diverse ecosystems to retain their function to survive natural disturbances, such as fire and drought, threats to sustainability and an increasing human population with local and regional needs.

## Implementation Schedules and Budgets

The revised plan will be implemented through a series of project-level decisions based on site-specific environmental analysis and public involvement. These analyses will be documented in the appropriate National Environmental Policy Act analysis documents. The plan seeks to guide management activities and projects by establishing clear desired conditions for the Coronado National Forest rather than by establishing schedules for actions. This approach should leave more flexibility for managers to adapt program and project selection as changes take place in budgets, resource capabilities, and management priorities.

Outputs in the Final Environmental Impact Statement are projections of probable outcomes. They were used to approximate activities and practices, in order to estimate the likely environmental effects of following the direction provided by the revised plan.

## Maintaining the Land and Resource Management Plan and Adapting to New Information

### Adaptive Management

A land management plan is an integral part of an adaptive management cycle that guides future management decisions and actions. Adaptive management includes:

- Defining measurable management objectives;
- Monitoring management outcomes and changing circumstances; and
- Revising management strategies accordingly (with appropriate environmental analysis).

This adaptive management cycle enables the Coronado National Forest to identify and respond to changing conditions, changing public desires, and new information. The Coronado National Forest monitoring strategy is an integral part of this adaptive management cycle, and consists of

monitoring questions and metrics (see chapter 6 of the revised plan for additional information about the monitoring plan).

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation are used to assess the degree to which on-the-ground management is maintaining or making progress toward the desired conditions and objectives in the plan. The monitoring strategy is described in chapter 6, “Monitoring and Evaluation,” of the plan. This monitoring program was developed collaboratively and focuses on key plan components where management projects and activities are likely to cause a change over time.

Specific monitoring questions are identified and directly linked to plan desired conditions, objectives, standards, and specific regulatory requirements. Only selected goals, objectives, and standards are monitored. Relevancy to issues, compliance with legal requirements, scientific credibility, administrative feasibility, long- and short-term budget considerations, and impact on work force all influence monitoring priorities.

Monitoring information will be evaluated and used to update inventory data, improve current and future mitigation measures, and assess the need to change the strategies used in plan implementation. Evaluation of monitoring results is directly linked to the decisionmaker’s ability to respond to changing conditions, emerging trends, public concerns, and new information and technology. No single monitoring item or parameter automatically triggers a change in plan direction. An interdisciplinary approach is used to evaluate information and decide what changes are needed.

The 2012 Planning Rule requires that forest plans that are developed under prior planning regulations, including the 1982 Planning Rule, follow the updated 2012 rule guidance on the required content in the monitoring plan. The Coronado developed its plan monitoring program consistent with the requirements of the 1982 rule, but also with an eye towards meeting the 2012 rule monitoring requirements. A monitoring program, consistent with 2012 rule monitoring requirements, is to contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators addressing nine monitoring categories, consistent with the monitoring requirements identified in the 2012 rule planning directives (Forest Service Handbook 1909.12, chapter 30).

The majority of the nine items are addressed in the plan monitoring and evaluation chapter. However, one 2012 rule monitoring requirement, that is not a requirement of the 1982 rule, is not directly addressed: focal species. Soon after the revised Coronado plan is approved, a monitoring transition process will be undertaken to identify focal species that should be part of the Coronado plan monitoring requirements.

## **Plan Amendments**

A forest plan may be amended at any time based on a preliminary identification of the need to change the plan. The preliminary identification of the need to change the plan may be based on a new assessment, forest plan monitoring, or other documentation of new information and changed conditions or circumstances. The amendment and administrative change process is described at 36 CFR 219.17(b)(2) of the 2012 Planning Rule.

The revised plan is a dynamic instrument that can be changed with appropriate public involvement and environmental analysis. Throughout the life of the plan, amendments may be needed to incorporate new information, new policy and direction, or changing values and resource conditions. Amendments will keep the plan current, relevant, and responsive to agency



and public concerns. Amendments are needed whenever any of the plan decisions should be changed due to any of the above conditions. The plan also can be amended for specific projects if during project design it is determined that the best method of meeting goals and objectives conflicts with standards and guidelines in the plan. Deviation from a guideline must be specified in either the decision document or elsewhere in the project record with supporting rationale. When deviation from a guideline does not meet the original intent, a plan amendment is required. Any deviation from a standard requires a plan amendment.

A 3-year transition period for plan amendments began on the effective date of the 2012 Planning Rule, on May 9, 2012. Plan amendments initiated prior to May 9, 2015, may proceed under the provisions of the 1982 Planning Rule, or may conform to the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule. All plan amendments initiated after the transition period (after May 9, 2015) must conform to the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule.

Under the 1982 planning provisions, amendments may be significant or non-significant. The Forest Supervisor may implement non-significant amendments to the revised forest plan after appropriate public involvement and environmental analysis. The Regional Forester approves significant amendments.

## Effective Date

The revised Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan will become effective 30 days from the date that the Environmental Protection Agency's Notice of Availability of the Final Environmental Impact Statement appears in the Federal Register (per 36 CFR 219.17(a), 2012 Rule).

## Appeal Information

This decision is subject to administrative review. According to 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3), if the responsible official chooses to complete an ongoing planning process under the provisions of the prior planning regulation, the responsible official can choose to allow for either an administrative appeal or can follow the objection process identified in 36 CFR 219 Subpart B. When the option is made to proceed under the 1982 regulations and to follow the administrative appeal process, the "Optional Appeal Procedures Available during the Planning Rule Transition Period" (the former 36 CFR 217 appeal procedures that were in effect prior to November 9, 2000) are to be used. For this decision, I have decided to use the "Optional Appeal Procedures".

A written notice of appeal must be filed in duplicate and postmarked or received within 90 days after the date the legal notice of this decision is published in the newspaper of record for the Coronado National Forest (*The Arizona Daily Star*). The appeal must clearly state that it is a Notice of Appeal being filed pursuant to the Optional Appeal Procedures. Appeals must meet the content requirements of Section 9 of the Optional Appeal Procedures, which are available for review at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/applit/includes/PlanAppealProceduresDuringTransition.pdf>

Appeals must be filed with the Chief of the Forest Service using one of the following methods:

**Physical address** (for UPS and FedEx deliveries):

USDA Forest Service  
Attn: Appeal Reviewing Officer  
201 14th Street, SW  
Yates Building, EMC, 2CE  
Washington, DC 20024

*(Note: If a phone number is needed for carrier delivery, use: 202-205-1449)*

**Regular mail:**

USDA Forest Service  
Attn: Appeal Reviewing Officer  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
EMC, Mailstop 1104  
Washington, DC 20250

**Electronically:**

Appeals may also be faxed to 202-649-1172, or appeals may be mailed electronically in a common digital format to:

[appeals-chief@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-chief@fs.fed.us)

The notice of appeal must be fully consistent with the optional appeal procedures and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to the optional appeal procedures;
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant;
- Identification of the decision to which the appeal is being made;
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the deciding officer;
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which the appeal is made;
- The reasons for appeal, including issues of fact, law, or regulation, or policy and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy;
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

Requests to stay the approval of this land and resource management plan shall not be granted (optional appeal procedures, section 217.10 (b)).

Final decisions on proposed projects will be made on a site-specific basis using appropriate analysis and documentation in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. Project decisions may be subject to the appropriate administrative review procedures, at the time the project decision is made.

Recommendations for designations such as additions to the National Wilderness System are preliminary administrative recommendations that will receive further review and possible

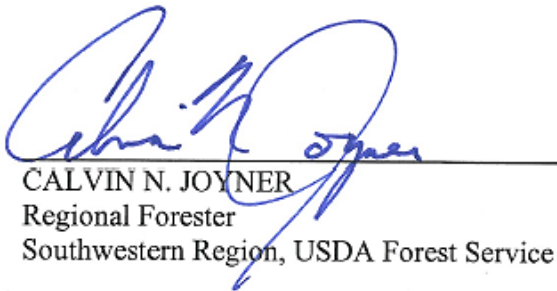
modification by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and/or the President of the United States. The Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness on Federal lands; therefore, wilderness recommendations in the revised plan are not appealable under the agency's administrative appeal procedures (section 4 of the optional appeal procedures).

I encourage anyone concerned about the revised Coronado National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan or Final Environmental Impact Statement, or who would like more information, to contact:

Kerwin S. Dewberry  
Forest Supervisor  
Coronado Forest Supervisor's Office  
300 West Congress  
Tucson, AZ 85701  
(520) 388-8300

## Approval

I am pleased to announce my decision to select Modified Proposed Action Alternative for the revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Coronado National Forest. This new plan has been built on a strong foundation of engagement with State and local governments, tribes, other Federal agencies, citizen collaboration and engagement with commodity-based, conservation, and other organizations, and incorporates the best available science.



CALVIN N. JOYNER  
Regional Forester  
Southwestern Region, USDA Forest Service

April 27, 2018  
Date